

REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER MIGNON L. CLYBURN
Disability Advisory Committee
June 16, 2016

Good morning and thank you, Karen for that kind introduction. Over the past decade, advancements in technology have helped to dramatically change the lives of people living with disabilities. These innovative products and services have broken down barriers that in the past made it difficult for those with unique needs to communicate socially, academically, and professionally, on par with their peers.

But, in less than two years, this Disability Advisory Committee by providing recommendations on issues like real-time text, video programming, and 9-1-1 services, has been a critical voice for individuals living with disabilities, and your keen observations as we consider these important issues when making decisions here at the Commission, are invaluable.

Earlier this month, as part of my #ConnectingCommunities tour, I had the privilege of visiting with DAC member Marcia Brooks at the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, MA, where we discussed further the importance of technology for individuals living with disabilities.

At Perkins, I saw first-hand the impact of the FCC's iCanConnect program, which is providing necessary communications equipment to individuals who meet federal income guidelines and have significant combined vision and hearing loss.

During my visit, we also discussed the development of affordable refreshable braille technology and a mobile app that helps those who are blind find their local bus stop. Positive forwarding thinking ideas, as demonstrated by the work of organizations like Perkins and advisory groups like the DAC, will help as we continue to bridge the long-standing communications divides.

And as a regulator, I believe it is imperative that we leave no one behind, particularly those who could benefit the most. This means fulfilling our obligation and duty to ensure that broadband is accessible and affordable to everyone, including individuals living with disabilities, because we know how that can and will change lives.

Unfortunately, we are still challenged with the needs of about six million persons with a disability who are also economically vulnerable, yet still do not have access to broadband.

The FCC's Lifeline program could be the best means to make communications services more affordable for consumers who qualify. This past March, the Commission modernized Lifeline to support broadband so that consumers can apply the program's discount to voice and or broadband services. I remain excited about how a reformed Lifeline program could ensure that more Americans share equally in the benefits of broadband. You will hear more about this shortly from Nathan Eagan of the Wireline Competition Bureau and I hope you will see how a properly recalibrated Lifeline program could address the affordability needs that exist in your individual organizations.

I cannot say enough just how much your work here can and does make a difference. In April, for example, the FCC initiated a proceeding on one of the DAC's recommendations concerning real-time text. The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking proposes to utilize real-time text to ensure that people with disabilities who rely on text to communicate, have accessible and effective telephone access. As networks move to IP-based systems, real-time text technology will allow Americans who are deaf, hard of hearing, speech disabled or deaf-blind, to use the same wireless communications devices as their friends, relatives, and colleagues.

It will also support more seamless integration with evolving communications networks.

Another way you have contributed, is with the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system, which has been critical in providing consumers with timely notifications during potentially dangerous situations, like child abductions, dangerous weather conditions, and manmade disasters. I understand the DAC's agenda today includes recommendations regarding enhancements to this lifesaving communications system that take into consideration the needs of people living with disabilities, who may receive these alerts in various formats. The DAC's Emergency Communications Subcommittee will share more with you later this morning.

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the landmark legislation that forever changed the lives of countless Americans. We have come a long way since, and stand to make even more progress, thanks to your work. I look forward to working with you as we strive to both meet the critical needs of this community and foster valuable technological innovations.

And I thank you, once again for your service and commitment to expanding accessibility in communications for the more than 50 million Americans living with a disability.